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Marxism

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The principal reason we consider Marxism here is that we consider it the principal contemporary threat to U.S. security. As an idea it is not worth ~~any~~ more than many of the other ideas of the nineteenth century, which were brought into existence by the peculiar conditions of that century and have ~~ever~~ since gone their way as conditions have changed. It so happened however, that Marxism, Communism, did get established as the official ideology of one of the great twentieth century world powers; and as such has, as we all know, become one of our chief contemporary dangers.

How are we to face this danger in a practical way? In the first place, we must remember that Americans are in a peculiar geographical and temporal situation. Not everyone in the world is as convinced as we are that Communism is erroneous. And we are going to have to deal with such people in the course of our work. We may look upon Communism as intellectually as well as morally weak. We may look upon Communists as at best misguided, and at worst fraudulent. But the time may come when we'll have to convince other people of this; others to whom it is not at all obvious that Communism is simply erroneous, and that Communists are only trying to get them on their side to use them for the purposes of Soviet Russia. Now such people may know the Communist position extremely well. They will know the dialectic; at least they will have heard of it. They will know the ideas involved in historical materialism, and those ideas may seem to them utterly convincing. But to argue with people in that position, and to convince them that we, as well as the Communists, have something to say, we have to familiarize ourselves systematically with the substance and the terminology of Marxism.

Another reason why we undertake these lectures is that they can help

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us to realize that it is extremely foolish to underestimate the appeal of Marxism to many different kinds of people. Communists are not all disagreeable people who hide in back rooms and make silly threats. Some of them are highly intelligent, some of them are intellectuals. They are sold on this doctrine for reasons which we may find it difficult to understand. But when we're dealing with human beings, we have to be prepared to face the fact that not everybody thinks the way we do. Also, Communism promises explicitly and specifically more than we as Americans are prepared to promise to the world. We simply do not have a program, and the Communists do; and programs, however erroneous they may be, do appeal. Finally, it should be studied by people in our position with the seriousness it deserves, and with the seriousness that is given to it by the people whose profession it is to further the aims of Communism.

Consider, then, that Marxism consists of three elements: a philosophy, an economic theory, and a political theory. We will consider the philosophy first, because it is basic to the economic and political theory and because it occurred to Marx first. Philosophy may be defined loosely as the study of reality, and it treats the question of the ultimate nature of reality. Philosophers set themselves to find out what things really are. What is the world? Does it require an explanation or doesn't it? Is it self-sufficient or isn't it? What is the human race, etc? Now Marx was a philosopher before anything else. He studied philosophy in the universities he went to, and he considered himself a philosopher during his early productive years. An understanding of his philosophical position is necessary, then, if we are to comprehend the political and economic developments in his later life. His metaphysical assumptions, in connection with the

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philosophic method which was then popular, gave him his philosophy of history. We will consider his philosophy then in three sections: his metaphysical position, his method, and his philosophy of history.

We may define metaphysics as the study of ultimate reality (whereas philosophy is the study of reality in its totality). And the metaphysics of Marx was materialism. Now we may state the position of materialism in the following propositions: First of all, the ultimate reality is matter. Second, the existence of matter precedes the existence of mind. Mind, in fact, is a manifestation of matter, a product of the material processes of the human nervous system and brain, much as light is a product of certain physical transformations within the external world. Matter is basic, then, and mind derives from matter. Third, matter exists objectively apart from our perception of it. (Here of course, materialists in general disagree with idealists, who insist that mind is the ultimate reality and matter is anything ranging from an illusion to something which is perhaps real but basically unimportant.) And fourth, complete knowledge of the material world is difficult and complex but not impossible. And derived from that fourth point, though it is not really central, is the belief that there are no ultimate mysteries, there cannot be by definition: anything real is knowable, anything knowable is understandable. In other words, there are no ultimately inexplicable phenomena - they can all be explained.

Now materialism is of course a very old idea; there's nothing revolutionary or startling about it. It goes back to the ancient world where many eminent philosophers were materialists. Such names as Democritus and Lucretius will of course immediately suggest themselves to your minds. However, it was almost totally submerged by the triumph of Christianity at the end of the decline of the ancient world, and was hardly heard of during

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at all. It was revived rather strongly however, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as a result of two things. First of all, the weakening of the humanist tradition which was part of the Christian tradition and accepted the Christian presuppositions about man and human nature, including the Christian idea that the nature of man consisted of an immaterial soul resident in a material body. Second, by the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth the popularity of the scientific method had by implication given philosophical materialism a great deal of prestige. So materialism began to become popular, and the point of view spread that nothing that we cannot perceive can be taken for granted, that the only thing we can depend upon is the perception of our senses playing upon physical matter. The rise of science also reopened philosophical questions which had appeared settled for centuries. What is the exact nature of reality? What is man's place in the scheme of reality? Does he have a place at all? If so, what is it? Is he just an accident? Is the world an accident or was it deliberately planned?

We have considered the elements of materialism and that is Marxist metaphysics; and now we will consider the dialectic, which is his method. Dialectic is also a very old word in philosophy, and it describes a method of argument which most of you will be familiar with, and which would run somewhat as follows: someone would make a statement and someone else would make an equally true antithetical statement; and out of those two antithetical statements a third statement could be derived which would be closer to the truth than either of the first two statements. Now that seems quite abstract, but an example often given is the derivation of a definition of man. We can say that man is an animal, which is observably and demonstrably true. He has all the characteristics of an animal, some more than others,

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of course. The opposition point of view could be stated, however, that man is rational, and no animals are rational. We now have two antithetical statements equally true. This is a contradiction which has long been realized about human nature and can only be resolved by the apparent contradiction that man is a rational animal, the only one known. Now the fact that man is a rational animal is a statement closer to the truth than either the simple statement that he is an animal or the simple statement that he is rational; both of which are true but neither of which is completely true. This is the dialectical~~X~~ in argument.

Now one of the elements of Hegel's philosophy is this: that the world and human history has evolved precisely through just such a clash of opposite ideas. The world, nature, exists in a constant state of clash of opposites, and this clash of opposites results in third elements which are closer to reality than the original two clashing elements; and human history too has developed as a clash of opposite ideas. Hegel's idea of history was that it was evolving towards what he called the Absolute Idea - he was an idealist, believing that ideas were the ultimate reality, and that they were constantly in conflict with each other. Marx accepted Hegel's idea about the way history had developed. That is, he believed it develops through clashing of opposite forces, that is the method; but he did not accept Hegel's idealism. He admitted that history was essentially a dialectic process, but in material, not in idealistic terms. This was Marx's revision of Hegel, that although history was a dialectical process, the clash of opposites yielding third forces which then clashed with their opposites was not a conflict of ideas but of material forces.

The dialectic itself breaks down into several elements; and we call these elements the laws of the dialectic. And there are three of them.

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The first law of the dialectic is the law of the unity of opposites. Now that law can be stated somewhat as follows: Every unit in existence - any physical object or arrangement of physical phenomena - a table, a man, a light bulb, a clock, a molecule, has within itself interacting opposite elements. Now if this inter-operation of the opposite elements of a physical unity were static, that is, if those elements just equally balanced each other out, then that unit would maintain its identity endlessly. In other words, a molecule not acted upon by any forces within itself, or outside itself, would remain a molecule of precisely its own substance indefinitely, forever. And the same is true of human society. If it had not set up within itself basic contradictions we'd still be in the primitive hunting stage. However, such is not the case. The inter-action within a unit is a dynamic action. The opposite poles of being affect each other dynamically and actively; they act upon each other, and thus force a crisis. In other words, they conflict. Thus nothing is static, nothing stays the same. Everything has within itself the contradictions that make it conflict with itself and ultimately change itself. No unit in existence can remain static, but must undergo a conflict within itself which will resolve into a new unit, a new entity, and this in turn will set up within itself internal contradictions and will further evolve. The original entity in this dialectic activity is referred to as the thesis. The contradiction within itself that conflicts with it and destroys it is the antithesis. And the third element, which derives from that conflict, is called the synthesis. Thesis, conflicts with antithesis, and resolves into synthesis. Then the synthesis, of course, is itself a new thesis, and sets up within itself a contradiction which conflicts internally with it. So much for the unity of opposites.

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The second law of the dialectic is the law of the transfer of quantity into quality. Nature is not simply an endless series of quantitative changes. In other words, it just doesn't accumulate change endlessly, something else is going on, a development in a given observable direction. A very simple example is the question of temperature changes. Take a body of water and successively add more and more heat to it, and it goes off into steam. Steam is not water; it is chemically the same as water but it is physically different. In other words, there has been a qualitative change brought about by a quantitative change of so many degrees of heat. Start taking units of heat away from it, and the steam condenses again into water; and if you keep on reducing the temperature, it becomes ice. Now, according to Marx, history obeys the same law. It does not resolve into an endless series of mere quantitative changes.

The third law of the dialectic is the negation of the negation. This law simply says that the synthesis in the dialectic process is the negation of the conflict between thesis and antithesis. In other words, the synthesis will be something completely different from the conflict which generated it.

We have so far examined the metaphysical position of Marxism, its basic assumptions about the world and what it is. We have seen that this position is dialectical materialism. Marx believed that history was a sequence of physical conflicts working their way out through a process of conflict and change. But what exactly are the physical forces involved? In order to answer this question, we have to apply the dialectical materialist method to history. It is materialistic, therefore we must look for material forces. Now, Feuerbach, a materialist who influenced Marx during his residence in Paris, maintained that man's basic social (therefore material) needs were

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production, reproduction, and communication. Marx rejected reproduction and communication as basic human necessities, and retained production. The common end of all men, he said, is production of the physical means of existence, of the physical necessities of life. This is an activity in which all men have to engage or have other men engage for them. Such being the case, production being the basic human activity, all other human activities are based upon it. Marriage, for instance, is a means of transmitting and conserving property. Religion is a technique for keeping the lower classes in line.

But if production of material goods is man's basic activity, what are the elements of this production? The forces of production are, on the one hand, man's labor and practical skill; that is, actual physical activity; and on the other hand, what are called the implements and tools of production: tools and techniques. Those are the elements of the productive process. What they reduce themselves to is tools, and people - men - to do the work. Now when these productive forces are changed in any way, when either the tools and techniques or man's labor and practical skill are changed in any way, then the productive relationships, as the Marxists call them, are changed. And when the productive relationships are changed, all other human relationships are changed. The industrial revolution, for instance, changed the techniques of production. Therefore, it changed the relationship between the producing people, the owners of the means of production and the non-owners of the means of production. Therefore, it changed all other human relationships. The disintegration of the family in modern life, for example, may be regarded as a result of industrialization, and consequent urbanization. The family is no longer the ultimate unit of society as it was long considered to be. The substructure of society, as Marxists call

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it, consists of the economic relationships. The superstructure consists of all other relationships - state, family, religion, philosophy, education, and so forth. Marx himself and his followers never went so far as to say that it's only the substructure that affects the superstructure. They admit that the superstructure also has a great deal of influence on the substructure.

The stages of society according to Marx were (and will be) the following: first of all, primitive society. And primitive society, he says, was communal society. The second stage was slave society; the third stage of development was feudal society; then capitalist society; and finally, the highest stage of society, socialist society, in which we return to communal ownership of the means of production. The way this works, according to Marx, and according to the nineteenth century anthropology that he was familiar with, is somewhat as follows: In the primitive state of man, however that came about, nobody owned the means of production. This may have been true, particularly in ancient Germany, the tribes as a whole owned certain parts of the land, and within that tract of land, every member of the tribe had equal hunting rights; or, when they got around to an agricultural economy, in many areas they split up the land, re-distributed it every year so that one man didn't get the choice plots of land every year. Thus the means of production of the physical necessities of life, food, clothing, and shelter were owned in common by the community, and were exercised by the community. However, since human society is an element in the physical universe, it had within itself certain contradictions, which immediately came into conflict. Little by little, some men would secure the land for themselves, find means of transmitting that property to their descendants, (hence marriage with all its attendant difficulties) and of making other

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people work for them, and then after a while of exchanging those people who did the work. So ultimately certain people were owners and other people were slaves. And this was the typical situation in the ancient world. The ancient world, however, had also ^{WITHIN} itself certain basic contradictions which could no longer be endured by the time of its decline and collapse, at which time slaves did secure certain rights from their former masters. And this is the origin of the feudal system. Now the feudal system was not slavery. It had many drawbacks, but it was still not slavery. The landed peasant had some rights: He could not be bought and sold; his family couldn't be split up. If the land was sold, he went ^{TO} with the new owner of the land, but he could not be separated from his family, and from the place where he was born, without his consent. Little by little, however, certain of these peasants got squeezed off the land or drifted into towns on their own volition. The towns began to grow and a rising class of economically independent people began to form in the towns, to set up shops, and go into businesses. And here you have the origin of the bourgeoisie.

Now you see what has been happening all along: two forces in society conflicting with each other and creating a third element. The primitive communal situation created slavery - a qualitatively higher form of social organization; feudalism created bourgeois capitalism. Capitalist society, however, according to Marx, is going to set up within itself, has in fact done so by our time, the same sort of intolerable contradiction that existed in all other forms of society. In other words, the owners within capitalistic society, although originally the oppressed medieval bourgeoisie, had by Marx's time become the dominant class in society. They had destroyed the power of the old aristocracy.

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independent, dominant class of the early nineteenth century. They were gradually gathering to themselves all the property there was. But certain other people showed up in the morning and worked until night, and they had nothing to say about the disposition of the product - they were the workers, who did not own anything except their own labor power, for which they were paid a wage and sent home. Capitalist society, then, is going to set up certain stresses too, and there's going to be another conflict by which we must restore the primitive communal organization of society; although now we can do it on a much higher plane, since the historic process has released productive forces which were formerly not known. So the next social-economic revolution will be the Communist revolution, after which everything will again be owned in common.

Since primitive times there's always been a conflict in human society. What have the productive relationships been? They have been relationships of exploitation. In other words, society has been ultimately divided into two major groups, which were antithetical to one another. And the conflict of these two groups, those who owned the means of production and those who did not own the means of production but had to work for those who did, has constituted the dialectic of history. That is the basic human struggle, the historical, dialectical process which is the source of human progress.

Now this, of course, led Marx to a study of economics and he set out to study the modern system of economics. He said that he sought to lay bare the economic laws of motion in modern society. And that is precisely what he did in Capital and in his other economic works. His economic theory is, of course, based on his concept of the class struggle. Since he believed that human society was a class struggle, he asked himself, what is the nature of the class struggle in capitalism? His economic theory, then, (S

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a critique of nineteenth century capitalism, and an exploration of the way in which capitalist exploitation was accomplished.

The class struggle always depends on this: that essentially the class of owners is depriving the non-owners of part of the full value of their product. Marx came to this conclusion, as a result of incorporating into his thinking elements of Ricards's Labor Theory of Value. The basic idea in the Labor Theory of Value is this: that the irreducible measure of value in a commodity is the amount of labor power expended in producing it; and labor power, as Marx defined it, is ultimately the average number of labor hours necessary to support life; and Marx described this as socially necessary labor. Socially necessary labor is the amount of labor absolutely necessary to support yourself. And from this he derived the idea of what he calls Surplus Value. Remember that Marx had asked himself, what is the nature of capitalist exploitation? Why does a capitalist produce? For profit. Then what is the source of capitalist profit? Surplus value: that value over and above the subsistence of labor which the laborer has given to the capitalist. In other words, the laborer has to work more hours a day than is necessary to support himself and his family. Let's say that he can make enough in four hours, in terms of actual physical production, to support himself and his family in terms of exchange value alone. He works eight hours a day, and in former times a good deal more. According to Marx's theory of surplus value, he is during that surplus time simply contributing to the well-being of the owner of the factory.

Now what about the future of capitalism? To begin with, it is the capitalists intention to constantly increase the margin of his profit.

He can do this in one of two ways: by making his laborers work longer

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hours, thereby increasing the amount of excess labor, therefore the amount of surplus value, therefore the amount of profit. This, of course, has obvious limitations, because even if they did not go on strike, they'd collapse over their machines. But he can also increase the efficiency of the laborer through machinery. Now Marx admitted that machinery increased the efficiency of the laborer. He denied, of course, that it was what he would call a source of value. But it did increase the efficiency of the laborer so that he could work better; that is, he could do more with less effort. So that was the way chosen to increase the profit. However, more and better machinery would mean automatically that fewer laborers were needed because if one man could do the work of two with the machine, that throws one man out. That means that more and more workers are going to be forced out of work, consequently into competition with each other for other jobs. Thus the average wage will go down, because if you have a great number of men competing for a job, you can offer what you wish for wages and they will have to take it. This, however, lowers the general purchasing power of society; and if there are fewer people to buy your products, you produce less and less. And what happens at the end of that is total collapse. People out of work means nobody to sell to; so the producer has to close down. This throws everybody out of work, and nobody has anything. Little by little, demands reassert themselves, and the enterpriser can start back in business. Then, however, the cycle will go into effect again, and another depression will follow.

On the other side of the picture you have one capitalist wiping out another through competition. Now how far can that go? One man squeezes out another and then another and then another and pretty soon has very few competitors, and pretty soon maybe five or six people will run the whole

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show. These few combine into cartels, trusts, and monopolies of various kinds on the one hand, while general social disintegration proceeds on the other, and ultimately the capitalist system will collapse after recurring crises.

We have so far discussed Marx's philosophy, materialism and dialectical materialism. We have seen its extension into history in the form of historical materialism, and its extension into economics. Now the very practical question suggests itself to us as it did to him - what does all this mean in terms of practical political activity? If all this theory is true, what is the nature of the state, what kind of government ought we to have, how about political parties, what about political action?

Well, the Communist concept of the State, like their economic theory, is based on the concept of the class struggle. Society is divided into two basic groups, and all other groups align themselves with these two: the owners of the means of production, and the non-owners of the means of production, the exploiters and the exploited. The State, according to Marx, is the machinery used by the owners of the means of production to exploit the non-owners of the means of production. It is the machinery used by the exploiting class to ~~exploit~~ exploit the exploited class. It is also peculiar to certain forms of society; it did not exist in feudal times, for instance, nor in primitive times. It is a form of social organization peculiar to times of great stress. The Roman Empire was a state because ancient civilization was breaking up and the dominant class in ancient civilization so organized itself that for centuries it prevented that breaking up. The break-up resulted in feudal, medieval society which again began to develop capitalist society and capitalist society produced states, national governments. However, this occurred again

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only at a time when society was divided into irreconcilable antagonisms for the final catastrophe. It is the very function of a state, then, to resist change; thus the state will ally itself with the essentially conservative elements in the society. Now the modern state has produced bourgeois democracy as the oppressive machinery. This is the machinery of exploitation, democracy. How does this work as the machinery of exploitation? In several ways. For one thing, the dominance of bourgeoisie society is directed not only against the lower orders, the laborers - it is also directed against the former aristocracy, which concentrated its power in nobility and kings and emperors. Parliaments were set up exactly to contravene such power, so the Parliamentary democracies of England, the United States, France, etc., were set up to give the bourgeoisie a voice. Now it is perfectly true, and Marxists would admit it, that gradually the franchise has been extended until in most modern countries it's pretty universal, extending to all adult men and women in the state. However, Marxists say that the masses don't really have anything to say; parties spring into existence really representing the dominant elements in society. Thus the modern state has produced bourgeois democracy as oppressive machinery. On the one hand, it oppresses the people who formerly ruled society, the aristocracy; on the other hand, it oppresses by deception the lower classes, which, if they really knew what was going on, would revolt and put their own people in power. However, the contradictions of the production relations within bourgeois democracy will ultimately precipitate a revolution. Why? Because, as we have seen, more and more wealth will be concentrated into fewer and fewer hands, more and more people will become poorer and poorer, and this will result in an inevitable conflict.

They will, then, conflict, these two classes; the lower class will revolt automatically against the upper class, having been welded into a unit by the very oppression that created it. After this last revolution, the last bulwark of repression and exploitation will have been overthrown, and there will be no classes, no oppressed, no oppressors, therefore no state. Why? Because it won't be necessary.

We can now go into the developments of Leninism and Stalinism. Now Marx was not in the first place interested at all in doctrinal completeness for its own sake; consequently he left a rather confused body of writings. This situation has led to a considerable variety of interpretation of thought. Such interpretations of Marx have ranged all the way from a simple acceptance of Marx as a very stimulating thinker (Henry Adams, for instance, said that Marx had taught him a good deal and had helped him in his thinking) all the way over to Leninism and Stalinism, as embodied in the present Soviet Union. Since this latter has certainly been the dominant form of Marxism in modern times, whether it's right or not, it's the one which we will choose to go into.

Lenin got hold of Marx's doctrines, and he so directed them that they are what we do basically have to contend with today. Now Lenin regarded Marx's teaching the way Marx regarded it himself - as a guiding set of ideas, rather than a fixed doctrine. And Lenin was the one who decided the way it would be applied in the contemporary situation. His contribution to Marxism was very definite and was essentially the incorporation into the basic theory of a practical revolutionary program. Now Marx had said that the revolution would occur. But Lenin was of course living in a different situation from Marx. He was not essentially a scholar, as Marx had been; but he was living in a very practical situation in Czarist Russia

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of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, in which revolution was as common as breathing, eating, or drinking. And Lenin was first of all a revolutionary. Since he was a master organizer and a very powerful personality, he could make ~~the~~ people do practically anything he wanted. He developed first of all the concept (which Marx had not worked up) of a limited disciplined party of professional revolutionaries. Limited, that is, in numbers, and disciplined in doctrine and action. He realized what it is not always clear that Marx and Engels realized, that the working class would not of itself develop into anything beyond trade unionism. The working class, like any other group of human beings, as long as it is reasonably well off and is not perpetually angry, is not going to cause any revolutions. Lenin said that classes are led by parties and parties are led by leaders. The second thing that Lenin contributed to Marxism was his idea of the proletarian dictatorship. Marx had envisioned proletarian rule after the revolution as a true democracy, a rule by all the people. But Lenin again realized that the ordinary man is pretty well content, and would slip back into bourgeois ideas. But the state after the revolution, he said, would have to be governed by his small party of revolutionaries, who really know what's going on and who can guide the working class. A revolutionary minority, in other words, with no pretense of majority rule. He developed also the concept of imperialist capitalism. Now Marx had pointed out that capitalism would go through a series of ever more severe crises until the capitalist fabric would disintegrate. That had not happened by the time Lenin appeared on the scene, and he found the answer to that difficulty in imperialism. He said that instead of the old situation in which capitalist companies within capitalist countries used to compete with each other, we now have competition between different

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capitalist countries. This is the imperialist phase of capitalism, competing for world markets. Stalin, to bring the theory up to date, has further modified Marxism since Lenin's death. He has attempted to adapt it to changing conditions which the Soviets had to recognize. The thing that Stalin has been most concerned with for obvious reasons was the question of the persistence of the state after the revolution. He did explain it very consistently in terms of Marxist doctrine. He justifies it in two ways: first, as an answer to capitalist encirclement; the Soviets envision the Soviet Union as surrounded on all sides by capitalist states who are eager to destroy it; and dependent upon that is the doctrine of Socialism in one country.

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